

Nebraska ODP earns 0-0 draw with Creighton

By Mike Cullina, Nebraska State Soccer Director of Coaching

OMAHA – On August 24, the Nebraska State Soccer Olympic Development Program earned a 0-0 draw at Creighton Stadium against the Creighton University women's soccer team. The ODP team was an all-star group of players from the 1986 through 1989 age groups.

The players were selected and coached by Mike Cullina, Nebraska State Soccer Director of Coaching based upon the input from Brian Leahy, Holdrege and Matt Avey, Lincoln, who are the head age group coaches for the 1987 and 1988 teams, respectively.

The team had one seventy-five minute training session to prepare for the game.

Environment

The soccer-specific facility Creighton University has built is among the top few stadiums in the country. As a soccer community, I hope all will support their efforts to maintain such an awesome environment for soccer. Head Coach Bruce Erickson met us for our 2:00 training session and afforded us the opportunity to get used to the surface prior to the game. He was extremely gracious in helping us put the event together.

Game Report

The game was played with three thirty-minute periods with unlimited substitutions. Neither team made many substitutions during the period.

Nebraska ODP played the first 70 minutes in a 4-4-2. The back line played flat with a holding and attacking midfielder. The wide midfield players had starting positions even with the attacking midfielder and tucked in centrally to create space for the outside backs to come forward both defensively and in the attack. The two forwards played centrally with one becoming the target forward and the other a penetrating striker. With 20 minutes remaining, we switched to a 4-3-3 with two attacking midfielders in front of a holding midfielder and a center forward and two wingers.

General

The ability of the team to withstand the first few minutes was vital to the overall success on the day. Our team had few touches and no possession and didn't cross midfield until the seventh minute. However, Creighton wasn't able to penetrate the back line and create great scoring chances. The team's confidence improved with each passing second and the game became very competitive, especially late where a couple good scoring chances were left unclaimed.

Goalkeepers

The three goalkeepers (Casey, Linder, and Odorisio) shared equally in the minutes, each playing one full period. Each brought a different dynamic to the team.

Defenders

On the whole, the back line has a lot to be proud of. As a back four, they maintained good shape, especially among the central two and became much more involved in the attack as the game wore on. The players provided good covering positions for each other, but did not solve and adapt to Creighton's formation well. Often the wide defenders were stretched to far from side to side, especially on the weak side. As Creighton switched play from one side to the other, the wide defenders were not effective in either intercepting the pass or pressuring the opposing wide midfielders, instead waiting for our midfield to recover.

Midfielders

Centrally, we became stronger with every passing minute. The players rose to the challenge and become technically more proficient as well as stronger on the ball when under pressure. The wide midfielders started too wide. Far too many opportunities for a double team were left untaken. The group was able to link a fair amount of passes, but was unable to make that final penetrative pass to spring a striker loose.

Forwards

This group was dangerous, creating the best two scoring chances of the game during the run of play. (Creighton actually put the ball across the goal line on a corner kick that was inexplicably missed by the assistant referee.) Especially after going to a front three, our three forwards were faster and technically superior to the Creighton defensive line. They were not, however, capable of combining with each other or the midfield to take advantage of several opportunities that never materialized. The forwards' lack of technical speed cost several goal-scoring opportunities as shots were never taken or blocked.

Player Reports

Anderson, Danielle – central defender, played the whole game, strong defender both technically and tactically, backed away from a couple challenges against larger opponents.

Berzins, Elisa – central midfielder, player of the game, good organizer, positive attitude, able to technically solve problems, did not organize the forward defensively thus allowing us to get stretched vertically, good job in keeping play predictable defensively.

Bigsby, Casey – wide midfielder/central midfielder, played whole game, very fit, aggressive both with the ball and without, extremely mobile and quick, dangerous when coming forward, lost several possessions when speed dribble let her down.

Bruch, Jordan – forward, changed the game when she entered due to skill and athleticism, several good scoring chances including one off the crossbar, didn't link well with other forward(s)

Casey, Kristen – goalkeeper, played first period, strong shot stopper, good communicator, needs to improve her distribution

Eilman, Brianna – forward (89 Regional pool), skillful player with very good ideas, will develop physically and be more competitive with time

Harris, Danica – right back/midfield, became more aggressive and comfortable as the game wore on, unable to get forward in the attack, covered well for midfield, stayed linked across the back line

Keller, Katherine – defensive midfield, strong, good tackler, distributes ball well from between touchlines, couldn't make penetrative pass

Kirchner, McKensie – forward/left back, versatile player, more effective in back line than up front, able to read the game coming forward, unable to play in traffic up front

Kosch, Ashley – forward, couldn't get involved in the game, decent skill, but tactically unable to free herself and get involved in the attack, had one good scoring chance

Linder, Kara – goalkeeper, long and athletic, technically strong, deals well with crosses, uncomfortable in traffic

Odorisio, Elizabeth – goalkeeper, good communicator, organizer and distributor, but needs to improve her fitness and lateral movement

Petz, Anne – attacking midfielder, became more competent as game went on, technical speed exposed under pressure, reads game extremely well, slow to process information, able to maintain possession in midfield

Peetz, Caroline – forward/right midfielder/right back, still seeking best position, great tackler, extremely athletic, great mentality, able to run at defenders with the ball, unable to solve problems technically when under pressure, most dangerous player on the field

Phillips, Cassie – center back, played entire match, covered and tackled well, gave good support to midfield, didn't communicate enough, avoided tackling physically stronger players

Pohren, Brigette – right midfield, able to play forward, but had trouble working with back line defensively

Remmenga, Holly – right midfield, injured

Stirn, Kendra – right defender, good tackler, aggressive, technically unable to relieve pressure or start attack, didn't read the game when opponent switched through midfield

Zuniga, Andrea – forward/right defender, young player still used to dominating her age group, skillful player able to get out of trouble, can create space for self, tactically doesn't think far enough in advance, more effective with play in front of her

What did we learn?

The lessons from this game are far reaching indeed. Every player was challenged and most accepted and responded through their play.

- Lesson #1 – Players, when put in an appropriate competition level that takes them out of their comfort level, will rise to the challenge and develop at a rate faster than can be replicated in any other environment.
- Lesson #2 – Players who have not developed a foundation of technical sophistication are exposed when the opponent is athletically superior. Their decisions are rendered useless if unable to apply and perform the technical functions those decisions demand.
- Lesson #3 – Many of our players are unable to play different formations and/or systems. Furthermore, these same players are unable to assign an appropriate solution to the opponents' formation.
- Lesson #4 – Athletically and psychologically, our players are more than capable of competing at the Regional and College levels.
- Lesson #5 – Nebraska does not produce enough high-level players/team to play in single age group league play. ODP events prior to Regional event are better served as true all-star teams regardless of birth year.

Conclusion

It is the responsibility of every adult involved in youth soccer to facilitate the development of the players. Events, such as this, where club coaches and parents work together regardless of member affiliation prove that as a soccer community we can achieve this goal.

Over the past year, the Nebraska Olympic Development Program has hosted their Winter Tournament against Oklahoma and Kansas and the Creighton women's scrimmages. These events must continue and expand to provide even more development opportunities for our top player that cannot be received in the current structure.

The Nebraska Olympic Development Program is an identification, selection and development program aimed at providing the top players in Nebraska the opportunity for growth and development, expose those players to potential college scholarship opportunities, and possibly earn positions on the US Youth Soccer Region 2 and US Soccer National Teams.

For more information, go to www.nebraskasoccer.org or contact Mike Cullina, Director of Coaching at coach@nebraskasoccer.org or (402) 596-1616.